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THAT "PICTURE NAIL."

The following clever editorial from a recent issue of the "N. Y. Evening Post," is well worth reading and study:

"The veteran critic and collector, Henri Rochefort, lately remarked of the price of pictures that it all depends upon the nail on which they hang. Applying the dictum to local conditions, if the nail is driven through the plush of a Fifth Ave. dealer, the dependent picture is appraised in five figures or in six; if the nail is driven through the plaster of some humbler establishment on a side street, the same picture is dear at three or four figures; if the nail belongs to a little dealer or an obscure auctioneer, the picture is worth whatever you will offer for it. In short, almost nobody buys pictures, and the startling prices that are daily recorded in the press are not paid for pictures at all, but for the glamor of accredited sales-rooms, the suavity of great dealers, or the notoriety of the former owners.

"Some recent events seem to bear out this rather cynical theory that the high prices are a result of pure snobbery. William M. Chase recently sold at auction a lot of canvases collected with the taste of one who is at once a great painter and an accomplished connoisseur. Well, this select lot of pictures, representing many of the most prized deceased artists, averaged about three hundred dollars apiece. And here immediately arises a paradox. For three hundred dollars you might perhaps buy some slighter work of a young American exhibitor in the Academy, but it would require several times that sum to buy a work of any American artist of established reputation. That is, last week one could have bought good paintings by painters whose fame is already his-

toric for a fraction of the price of current work by actively productive men whose enduring quality is not merely problematical, but obviously doubtful. The conclusion seems obvious that most buying of modern painting must rest rather upon friendship or caprice than upon taste, or that there must have been some especial reason why Mr. Chase's treasures brought only a fraction of their value. The inference seems inevitable that in the studio of a mere painter and man of taste they had been hanging upon the wrong sort of nails.

"Other recent facts support this interpretation. To name certain sales of the artistic remains of multi-millionaires might be invidious. Suffice it to note that these sales contained many painters, the examples no better, represented in Mr. Chase's collection, and the prices were from five to ten times higher. What made the difference? Why, the knowledge that these multi-millionaire pictures had hung on very expensive nails, the comforting assurance that lots of money had been spent for the pictures themselves, and perhaps a corresponding misgiving that Mr. Chase had bought his fine pictures cheap. The Italians have a proverb about the sweetness of lips that have already been kissed, and clearly the American amateur has somewhat the same predilection for pictures already consecrated by the golden shower.

"On the purely economic side the case is worthy of investigation. The enormous prices paid for pictures that happen to be hung on the right nail has actually depreciated the general art market. The great run of fine pictures, not technically of highest rarity, bring less to-day than they did twenty years ago. The great dealers flourish while the multitude of little antiquaries who minister to collectors of taste and moderate means find it hard to make a living. For the astute amateur this spells opportunity, for art museums with limited funds it means impotence, for the general art market a degree of demoralization. In twenty years all art objects conventionally of highest rarity have appreciated about twenty-fold in price, while, as we have said, the general scale of value for merely fine works of art has probably been considerably lowered. The art market has abolished the comparative degree, and works only in the positive and superlative. The cause of this somewhat grotesque phenomenon is the presence of half-a-dozen collectors, mostly Americans and none of the finest taste. They pay without question any price that is asked for what seems to them a masterpiece, and their competition has sent a narrow line of art values soaring with a speed for which the Stock Exchange itself affords inadequate parallels.

"The question is, how long will it last? Even aesthetically active multi-millionaires are mortal, and three or four deaths might knock the bottom out of the present inflated market. Not necessarily, however. There might be sons of like mind, or there might conceivably be new recruits of equally enthusiastic disposition towards the pictures that have hung on the right nail. Yet when it gets about, that masterpieces of the most indisputable artistic value have all along been bought off the wrong nails for very moderate prices, the zeal for costly extraneousities may wane. If this were to come about, there would certainly be temporary consternation where the right nails are at present driven, but it is hard to see that the republic would thereby take either aesthetic or financial harm."

It seems to us that while the general argument of the above editorial is well founded and logical, that the writer has overlooked one important factor in the valuation of pictures—and one that most influences careful and wise purchasers—namely, the "provenance," as the French call it, or the history and environment, past and present, of canvases that come upon the market. A picture, for example, to speak frankly, that has hung or hangs upon a nail in the older and established Fifth Ave., Bond St., or Place Vendome dealers' galleries, has a better "provenance," it will, we think, be admitted than one

that has been suspended or suspends from perhaps an equally good nail in the gallery or rooms of some smaller, newer, less known side street art house. The established American and European art houses of reputation for honesty and fair dealing, have long enjoyed and enjoy the assets of a wide connection, sources of information as to their wares, and the long purse necessary to secure, and often hold for years, the best original pictures, which assets the smaller dealers do not possess. The nails in the former galleries are therefore more apt to sustain pictures of authority and authentication than the latter.—Ed.

BOSTON.

The short and pleasant journey to Boston is just at present exceedingly worth while to art lovers, for the "Hub" is stirring with art interest and life. The new Museum is calling for study of its well-lit galleries and their treasures, especially the Oriental collections, while the French pictures, sent over by the Société Nouvelle, and already shown in Buffalo, Chicago and St. Louis, but for some unexplained reason kept away from New York by those who should, it would seem, be most anxious to have them displayed in the Metropolis, have not been seen to as good advantage elsewhere as in the lofty and spacious and beautifully lit Central Gallery of the Museum.

The Museum and its contents are supplemented as a drawing card for art lovers by the remarkably fine and distinguished exhibition of old and modern Spanish pictures in Copley Hall by the Copley Society, and which is the best show this Society has thus far made, while the Vose Galleries on Boylston St. are filled with a small but exceptionally choice collection of old masters to be described and illustrated next week, and in the Weekes Gallery on Arlington St., the New York house of Durand-Ruel is showing a selection of choice earlier and late examples of Monet, several famous Manets, Degas, and other of the French Impressionists, with a few rare old masters. The Ehrich Galleries, also of New York, have also a small but choice lot of old masters at Doll & Richards', and the Ralston Gallery again of New York has a few good Barbizon and early English pictures at Folsom's. Isn't this a dainty art feast to set before the Boston Kings?

Seventy-three oils by the old Spanish masters and their successor Goya, and thirty-four by the modern Spanish masters with forty-one etchings with aquatint, including thirty of the "Caprices," four from the "Bull fights" and seven from the "Proverbs," and a stunning copy of El Greco's "St. Ildefonso," make up the Copley exhibition. The oils are hung—the old examples in the large Gallery, the modern in the adjoining small room, and the Goya etchings in the still smaller room, leading out of the small Gallery.

No better appointed and lit Gallery for such a display exists in the country than Copley Hall, and the larger Gallery in particular, with its light gray wall covering, its gray floor and benches, its green laurel trees and garlands, and its flooding, beautiful light, make a most effective and beautiful frame for the splendid showing of master-works on the walls. These too, are hung and spaced with rare skill and taste, and the impression that the Gallery and pictures give is one that emphasizes the strength, dignity and beauty of early Spanish art. The modern works, chiefly examples of the clever Canals, the brilliant and dashing Sorolla ("the only painter, dead or living" as Carroll Beckwith says, "who can squeeze sunlight out of a tube"), the thoughtful, virile Zuloaga, the finished, polished "peaches and cream" Madrazo, and the smooth, delicious landscapist, Sanchez-Perrier, are also well and attractively shown.

The chief contributors, and those who have sent the most notable canvases to the

exhibition are the Ehrich Galleries, Messrs. George A. Hearn and Henry C. Frick, Durand-Ruel, Dr. Stillwell and Mrs. Philip Lydig of New York, Mr. Frank G. Macomber, the eminent collector and curator of Saracenic and Eastern art at the Boston Museum, Arthur Astor Carey, Horatio G. Curtis, Desmond Fitzgerald, and R. C. and N. M. Vose of Boston, and Dr. Paul Mersch of Paris.

Many of the pictures, both the old and modern, are too well-known to New York art lovers to need description, such, for example, as Mr. Frick's superb portrait of Cardinal Zuiroga, by Greco, Mr. Hearn's rich, splendid "Flight into Egypt," by Collantes—the only landscape shown—his most unusual stunning full length standing portrait of the Infanta Isabella Claire Eugenie, by Coello, and his fascinating speaking portrait of Juan Manuel Alvarez de Para, by Goya—Mrs. Lydig's Greco, "The Monk," and her exceptional Moros "Portrait of a Spaniard," and "Spanish Woman of Bruges," and her equally exceptional and alluring full length standing presentment of a "Young Spanish Noblewoman," "Girl in Red," by Coello—so different, as is Mr. Hearn's example, from the stiff, hard fancy paper doll Coellos, so prevalent.

The display is especially rich in Goyas and Grecos, and no student or lover of Spanish art should fail to see these examples of such masters alone. There is shown, for example, in addition to the Goyas named, that admirable presentment of the young priest in the blue cape, "Don Fray Fernandez," and the stirring spirited presentment of a bull fight (a water-color as strong as an oil), for the importation of both of which, Mr. Victor G. Fischer of New York, is responsible, although the Worcester Museum has captured the former, the charming portrait of La Marquise de San Andres from Durand-Ruel, of the ugly but fascinating Queen Luisa, from the Ehrich Galleries, and the "Bull Fighter," loaned by Lady Drummond.

El Greco is represented, as has been said, by Mr. Frick's wonderful "Cardinal," and Mrs. Macomber's small, but exquisite in expression, "Head of Christ," "The Annunciation," from Durand-Ruel, the dramatic "St. Francis of Assisi," from Ehrich's, Mr. R. S. Minturn's "Count Orgoz," and Dr. Stillwell's fine and unusual "Portrait of a Gentleman."

Zurburan is strongly represented—his most beautiful example, the lovely refined yet strong, "Saint of Seville," from Ehrich's, while Mr. Jonger's example, "Head of St. Catherine," has great charm. Of Ribera, the best example to my mind is Mr. Macomber's "St. Jerome," unquestionable in its richness of color and strength of expression. The examples of Murillo are not convincing, unless one agrees with the attribution of the "St. Sebastian," a most beautiful and wonderful canvas whoever painted it (it was first given to El Cano), I doubt the small group of "The Nativity," that comes from the Walker collection of Minneapolis.

Before closing this hasty review I must mention the fine large figure composition by Herrera, the younger, from Senator Colin's collection of Algiers, loaned by Dr. Paul Mersch, and which in drawing, color and dramatic composition is a most striking work.

James B. Townsend.

OBITUARY.

Henry Bacon.

Henry Bacon died in the Anglo-American Hospital in Cairo March 13. He was born in Haverhill, Mass., in 1839, and when 22 became field artist for "Leslie's Weekly" and served in the war until wounded.

After the war he went abroad and studied under Frère and Cabanel in Paris. For the last ten years he spent his summers in London and his winters in Cairo.

One of Mr. Bacon's best known oils is "Gen. Gates and the Boys of Boston Common." It was his water-colors of caravan life and desert scenes which brought him fame. He is survived by his second wife—who was Louisa Lee Andrews of Baltimore—a niece of Secretary Bayard.

Walter L. Dean.

Walter L. Dean, the marine artist, died in Gloucester, Mass., March 13, aged 56. Mr. Dean began his studies at the Boston Art School and continued them under Boulanger and Le Febvre in Paris. The painting "Peace" now in Washington is one of his best works.